



# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

*The mission of Compassionate Friends is to assist families toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child of any age and to provide information to help others be supportive.*

## SOUTHWEST DALLAS COUNTY CHAPTER

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*Hi Rob,*

*It will be 4 years this month since you left us, a choice neither yours or ours. I still struggle with all the "Why, and What If's". Kain is really big and we speak of you all the time. He likes hearing stories I tell him about you and your brother growing up. He says he's going to college in Waco like you did, but he's going to Baylor. These past 10 months you have been joined by your Aunt Bea, Aunt Elvie and your Grandpa. I know you are all Happy to be together again. I Miss You every second of every day and wait until the day I can see you smile, and ask me "Hey Lady what took you so long"? Rob We All Love You and Miss You very much!!! We will Always remember you and speak your name, because when we do, it Always makes us smile.*



*Mark, Mom, William, Kain, Dad, Louise and Matt*



Find us on  
**Facebook**

The Compassionate Friends of Southwest Dallas County now has a Facebook Page. We invite you to join. You will need to log into Facebook to join the group. You will also need a Facebook account (they are free). After you sign up enter our name in the search bar. Our hope is that you will be able to connect to someone to help you in your grief journey. Remember "We Need Not Walk Alone".



## BIRTHDAYS



Kyle Edward Crews son of George  
Sierra Nevada Belle Gregory granddaughter of David & Joyce  
Sean Michael McBride son of Ross & Tracy  
Tommy Pantoja son of Deborah  
Eric Stefon Byrdsong-Nelson son of Stephania  
Brooke Ashton Cambron daughter of Donna  
Eric Hargrave son of Patsy  
Ryan Henley Johnson son of Donna



## ANNIVERSARIES

Robert Daniel Langston son of Willie & Connie  
Deon Damarco Jones son of William & Dorothy  
William Lynn Lambert son of Hazel  
Tiffany Cox daughter of Jennifer  
Sierra Nevada Belle Gregory granddaughter of David & Joyce  
Bryan Boykim grandson of Kim  
Joel Jackson son of JoAnn  
Christopher Walton son of Stan & Brenda  
Marino Valdez son of Eusebio & Connie  
Quinton Davis son of Randy & Pam  
Ryan Henley Johnson son of Donna  
Chloe Madison Robinson daughter of Nicole  
Shanna Thornhill daughter of Clint & Joy



## In This Place

Brave hearts, you are here. You have traveled  
a dreadful distance. You have come,  
seeking solace, understanding, hope,  
threads to patch what death's so cruelly undone.

In this place you can relax and breathe . . .  
the coats of others' expectations taken off.  
Walk into these few hours as into an oasis  
where draughts of love and memories can be quaffed.

In this place all names can be spoken;  
in this place each one's story may be told.  
We will not be discouraged by your sorrow;  
in this place ALL feelings, we enfold.

Here laughter does not mean we are forgetting;  
we do not count how many tears are shed.  
Both fuel us, fellow travelers, give us courage,  
for the long and winding road that is ahead.

And those we love are pleased we are together.  
They smile down on us, and bless this day,  
glad for every tiny step we're taking  
and send their light to guide us on our way.

Traveling with us as we journey onward,  
sending strength for what the miles may bring,  
they are a part of everything we do that matters -  
in every dance we dance, and every song we sing.

# **Sibling Grief - Have We Forgotten Them?**

By Maureen Hunter

## **The broken pieces of my heart came out with my tears as I thought of you...Bonnie Hutchins**

This article was inspired by my daughter Bonnie, whose idea it was for me to write about sibling grief. Instead I decided to interview her and here I share her heartfelt and inspiring responses to what it means for her to lose a brother. She describes herself as one of the forgotten bereaved.

### **Bonnie, can you tell me briefly the circumstances surrounding the loss of your brother?**

I got a phone call early on a Saturday morning telling me Stuart had been in a car accident. My first reaction was to worry but I remember thinking, "At worst he will have broken his leg".

I met family at the hospital and saw Stuart, I knew in that moment he would die. From then on I concentrated all my energy on looking after Stuart and doing what was best for him. 5 days later we turned off his life support.

### **How did that loss impact on your life?**

It changed a lot in how I viewed things. I found it much harder to be sympathetic or understanding to what I felt as being trivial worries. Compared to losing Stuart, everyone else's problems felt trivial. In time I have become more understanding of grief, people's own pain at loss and how I deal with certain problems. Before Stuart died I was not confident in my abilities to be a strong and confident person. In losing him I realized if I can deal with that, I can deal with anything.

### **What did you find most helpful or comforting to you during that early time of grief?**

For me, I concentrated on other things. I had a young daughter so struggled to deal with my grief. Instead I found life motoring on without really allowing myself to grieve. I found practical things helped most. Keeping and putting up lots of photos of him, talking with friends and I even ordered his medical records to look over. This would not help everyone, but it helped me to know my decision to fight for Stuart's life support being turned off was the right one. It was. Even now, 4 years later, I know deep down that how I have grieved was not the most productive, and I often feel the need to grieve. The time will come, for now I feel content that I grieved how I could, and best I could at the time.

### **What did you find least helpful or caused you additional worry or distress?**

After a time, certain things added to my sadness. Milestones, seeing others little brothers grow up and even simple TV shows I couldn't watch. They are all things I have learnt to adjust to. A lot of how I grieve is in private so sometimes I felt bombarded with it all. People asking how I was? Or in fact, forgetting me altogether and just asking how mum and dad were. As a sibling, you do sometimes get forgotten in it all.

### **Was there one aspect of grieving you found particularly difficult?**

I had a lot of guilt. As a sibling, quite often the love is unspoken. I felt tremendous guilt about how I had treated my younger brother. I teased him growing up and I felt so guilty about it. Also guilty that I didn't call him enough see him enough or support him enough. All of which I see now as completely normal. When a sibling dies you automatically feel you didn't see them enough, or speak to them enough or perhaps you treated them badly. You didn't. You just had a normal sibling relationship, only now, you have been cursed with hindsight. That's another reason why I tell my loved ones I love them almost whenever I think it. I don't want the feeling of "should have" again.

Grieving is acceptance. A lot of that is accepting the sibling relationship you had for what it was and knowing you loved them and even if it was unspoken, they loved you too. Once I truly accepted that our relationship was what it was and we did our best at the time, and once I accepted Stuart knew I loved him (which all siblings I feel have a knowing of) I was on the road to being content again.

### **Do you feel the loss of your brother has changed you or how you view life, if so in what way?**

Yes, very much so. I look at losing my brother and its accompanying grief as sort of a disease, like diabetes. You can treat it, but it's not curable. Grief and the loss are always with you, but you find ways to "treat" it. Losing my brother is a big part of who I am and how I got where I am. I love the people I love more, and make sure to tell them more. I appreciate the simple joys in life, whereas before he died, I know I took them for granted. I have a deep understanding of my own strength now, and the strength of our family. To go through the loss of someone so special changes you, and for a family to come through and survive loss, makes them closer. It did for us anyway.

### **What do you think has helped you most in your grief overall?**

Support and Understanding - I remember feeling sorry for my friends and extended family because they simply had no idea how to help or what to say. Then there were the people who didn't say anything. If I cried, they just hugged me. If I needed to talk they just listened. A grieving person doesn't need much, just to know they are not alone. I got a lot of that and it helped the most.

I also found my own way to honor him. I got his name tattooed on my wrist, have a special Christmas ornament to bring out every year, so he is with us. And I make sure my daughters know of him and recognize his continued importance in my life, and theirs.

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## PROGRESS CHECK

It's usually around this time of year, when summer is nearly over and fall is around the corner, that I like to take a close look at the progress of my recovery. Maybe it's the seemingly endless "back-to-school"; sales that suddenly end, or the return of the yellow school busses with children carrying lunch boxes that causes me to feel a need to take a look. This is one of those times of year that some of us find difficult to deal with, and checking where we stand during rough times is always a good idea, especially if it helps us find areas in which we can improve. As a possible bonus we may even find areas of real progress that may boost our awareness of the positive steps we have made. It usually is difficult to notice the steps we make, particularly early in recovery, unless we make a concerted effort to notice them.

So the first step should be to look closely at your beliefs concerning what you will find. If you believe your recovery is going poorly, it probably is—or it's likely not going as well as it could. We tend to see what we believe we will see and we tend to miss what we believe is not there. Dr. Wayne Dyer's book, *You'll See it When You Believe it*, covers this topic very well and I recommend it along with any of his other books as excellent recovery reading material. The quality of our recoveries, as well as our lives, is determined by what we believe.

If you develop an attitude of positive expectation about your recovery you will begin to see your progress more easily. What you need to do is adopt a belief that you *can* find something positive about your recovery no matter how small the positive may be if you look closely enough. The trick is to convince yourself that noticing the smallest of positives is worth the trouble. It is worth the trouble—your life depends on it. Noticing the smallest of positives can enable you to make a necessary positive mental attitude shift that is required for good recovery. Having a positive mental attitude is not the same thing as positive thinking. It doesn't mean that you pretend that everything is okay when it isn't. Positive mental attitude means that no matter how bad things are we can at least learn something of value from even the most horrible things that happen to us.

I'll use an extreme example to make my point. Early in recovery the very best positive we may be able to come up with is, "well, at least I believe there is hope that someday I will feel better than I do now." Admittedly, when our child has died, even this small positive may be difficult to believe, but let's say you do believe it, or you're willing to believe that you will *someday* believe it. As weak as this positive may seem to you it still is strong enough to begin the process of causing a positive mental attitude shift.

The shift will be small and probably not noticeable to you, but it will nevertheless occur. With this shift you will be more likely to notice other positives, for example, you are reading this newsletter and are therefore obviously taking a positive step to see if this article has some value to you in your recovery. Even if it didn't, the fact that you are reading it alone is a positive recovery step if you choose to see it as such.

We often choose to see our small steps as insignificant. This judgment alone is enough to slow our recoveries to a crawl. Each step no matter how small is required to complete the journey. The sooner you accept even the smallest recovery step and celebrate each and every one as it occurs, the sooner you will benefit to the greatest extent each step offers.

So how do you do this? There are several ways. My favorite is to ask three questions. Early tomorrow morning, as soon after awaking as you remember, ask yourself the question, "What can I do today to improve the quality of my life?" It doesn't matter what you come up with, but be sure you keep it simple - make sure it's something you can easily do. Tomorrow evening ask yourself, "How did I do?" Write your answer in a notebook or journal. Then answer the question, "No matter how small, what positive recovery steps have I taken today?" Do this everyday for at least ten days. Each day come up with different answers. At the end of ten days you will know if it is beneficial to your recovery to continue. If so, by all means do so. If not, you may find it helpful to do a progress check on your recovery by asking yourself these questions for a few days every month or so. Give it a try, you'll only know if it's a positive for you if you do.

By Pat Akery, TCF, Medford, OR

"Friendship improves happiness and abates misery, by the doubling of our joy and the dividing of our grief."

Marcus Tullius Cicero

*"Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak  
Whispers the o'er-fraught heart, and bids it break."*

*William Shakespeare*

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### **What would you say to someone else who is dealing with the loss of a brother or sister?**

Grieve how you can. If you don't feel ready to cry but want to scream, that's ok. Talk to your other sibling if you have one. They understand.

Don't be forgotten. If you need help or need a hug, you still have your parents and you are still their child. Tell them. Do special things. Write down your favourite memories. Put up photos. Plant a tree. Get a memorial tattoo. Whatever makes you feel they are close to you...they are.

*Maureen Hunter is an author, grief coach and bereaved parent, widely known for providing comfort, hope and inspiration through her writings and Stepping Through Grief Programmes. I would like to invite you to claim your FREE report: "Opening the Door to Hope.... Helping you Step through Grief" when you visit <http://www.esdeer.com>*

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## *Welcome...The Classroom for Learning to Live Again*

Many of us are very aware of classrooms at this time of the year as the new school year begins for our children and young people of all ages. For some, the experience is not one they look forward to with pleasure, and it means the end of the carefree, unscheduled days of the summer. There was no need in their lives for continuous disciplined thinking and living. There were happy vacations, lots of swimming in a pool, picnics, and lots of baseball playing --- all requiring lots of running and yelling, and of course the quiet lazy times when they could read about their special interests, work on hobbies, or just do nothing.

Now they are required to settle down into a set schedule and routine of doing what they may not especially enjoy at school, in the classroom and at home. They must adjust to the confinement of sitting behind a desk for a specific time and to the need to concentrate for long periods of time on courses that are required for their education, but in which they have no special interest and which they may not even be able to comprehend. So, they must discipline their thinking, or they will be disciplined with extra work, low or failing grades, seemingly unfair, demanding teachers, and with questioning parents.

We can liken this setting somewhat, but in a much more intense way, to bereaved parents as they attempt to pick up the pieces of their lives after their child has died, and attempt to make some sense out of it all. Our happy carefree summer was the time before we experienced this most crushing loss, no matter how large or numerous our problems may have been in reality. Compared to this loss, all other problems simply fade away as if they never existed. And now, at least for a time, we are faced with the belief that there can never be any more summers. We must learn to climb out of this abyss. For those who have accomplished this, they report that this education is the most difficult work anyone will ever do.

We can imagine that we are in a classroom. Here, we are encouraged because we learn that all the other students are bereaved parents. So, the first step upward is when we learn that we are not alone, that there are those around us who do understand, and who really do know how it feels and how painful it really is. Next, we discover that there are no teachers to tell us what is right and what is wrong. Instead, there are guides to assure us they and others more advanced than we are, have also had the same thoughts and feelings, or similar ones. This assurance that we are not "cracking up" gives us the confidence we need to climb up several more steps.

At this point, we find that it is becoming easier to concentrate on at least some of the simple daily tasks, such as grocery shopping or planning and preparing a meal or making a special dessert the family hasn't had for so long. Seeing their approval and appreciation gives us the power to discipline ourselves to try even harder because we see and feel that we have made a lot of progress with this "course" which we are required to "pass".

It doesn't matter if, during our most difficult periods, we slip back down a few steps. Because by this time, we have climbed the steps of concentrations and disciplines. We have the assurance that there are many hands reaching out to us and voices encouraging us, assuring us that we are almost there. However it is always necessary for each one of us to take each step by himself. Finally, we just know beyond a shadow of a doubt, that if others did it and they believe in us, then we can do it, too. So no matter at what step you are in the "course" in this classroom, you can receive the help, the assurance, and the encouragement you may need to "graduate". Then you may help the many others who every day are just beginning and are just entering this classroom.

For you the first step may be to come to our meeting where you can meet and talk with the other "students" who are still struggling at various levels with the same "course" that you are. Even if you don't need us, we need you. Take that first big step and come to the meetings... you will get the help you need.

# Rebuilding Your Life One Piece at a Time

Death, especially unexpected death, changes one's life in ways that cannot be expected. With the death of someone close, one's world is forever changed.

One analogy I have found myself using with clients is the following: If you were to imagine the day before your loved one died, there was an intact picture of your life. The picture may not have been perfect, but it was there and it made sense. There was a beginning, a middle and an expected end. With death comes the destruction of that picture. It is as if the picture is taken out of your hands, smashed to the ground in a thousand pieces and then some of the most treasured pieces are forever taken away.

The challenge with grief is to then take all of those pieces which are left and attempt to make a new picture. The picture of the life you once had is impossible to recreate, as much as one may try, it cannot be recreated with pieces missing. A new picture must be assembled with the pieces that are left and with new pieces that are picked up along the way.

The process of "putting the pieces back together" is one that often feels chaotic and confusing. It may sometimes be surprising to find out how much thinking is involved in the grief process. Thoughts bounce around trying to connect "what was" with "what is" and struggle to make sense out of what seems to be incomprehensible.

With each piece, the bereaved, through trial and error, find where each piece belongs or even if it belongs at all. This process is different for every person and does not adhere to any kind of timeline. This (what feels like endless) thinking is the work that grief demands – it is the creation of a new picture of your life – created one piece at a time.

*Written by Stephanie Elson, lifted from the Tears to Hope August/September 2007 newsletter of The Amelia Center, Birmingham, AL, providing a place of hope for grieving children, parents and families, [www.ameliacenter.org](http://www.ameliacenter.org)*

## Awkward Silence

I wish that someone would say his name.  
I know my feelings they're trying to spare,  
And so we go through the charade, the game,  
Of dancing around the ghost that is there,  
Trying to avoid evoking a tear,  
Or stirring emotions too painful to bear.  
That he be forgotten is what I fear,  
That no one will even his presence miss,  
As if there were no trace that he was here.  
Be referring to him, my purpose is  
Not to stir pity or keep things the same,  
But my heart will simply break if his  
Memory will die like a flickering flame.  
I just wish someone would say his name.

Richard Dew, M.D., TCF, Knoxville, TN

## Riding The Wave

Tears flow freely from my eyes  
The dream is now a reality  
All the wishes, all the prayers, and hopes  
Are now stopped and forever in the past  
So what do I do now  
Who do I become  
For the mother of a child, I can no longer claim  
But if I believe  
If I have faith  
There is no end  
Just a so long  
Then I know that the days of eternity  
Will far surpass these days without you  
So bring on the tears  
and let the rainbow come through  
For God's eternal pot of gold is my salvation

Katy Thomeer TCF Southwest Dallas

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Compassionate Friends of Southwest Dallas County meets on the third Tuesday of each month at 7:00 PM in the parlor of the First United Methodist Church in Duncanville. The church address is 403 S. Main St. The parlor is located behind the church at 206 W. Daniel St. Child care is available.

### Welcome

We extend a warm welcome to those who attended their first TCF meeting last month. We deeply regret the circumstances that brought you to our TCF Chapter. The Compassionate Friends is a mutual assistance, not-for-profit, self-help organization that offers support and understanding to families who have experienced the death of a child. You are cordially invited to attend our monthly meeting (always the third Tuesday of the month). The meeting is open to everyone and free of charge. You are free to talk, cry or to sit in silence; we respect the individuality of mourning. Comments shared in the meetings remain confidential. Our chapter is operated entirely by volunteers dedicated to furthering the work of TCF. Your voluntary, tax deductible donations honor your loved one(s) in a meaningful way by enabling us to print and mail this newsletter and meet other expenses involved in reaching out to other grieving families (100% of funds are used for this outreach). Donations, along with the name of the person being honored, may be sent to:

**TCF Southwest Dallas  
P.O. Box 380011  
Duncanville Texas 75138**

## NEWSLETTER POLICY

Sponsoring a newsletter is a way to remember your child at any special time through the year. You may include a picture of your child (if emailed please use JPEG format) and a brief (100 words or less) comment about your child. To guard against identity theft, please do not include full birth or death dates. A donation of \$20.00 will help cover the cost of postage for the newsletter. Please make all submissions by the 20th of the month prior to which you wish them to appear.

This is your newsletter. Please feel free to submit your own writings, book reviews, articles or poems you have found helpful. Be sure to include the author's name and source. Articles may have to be edited for space.

Please email to: [tcfswdallas@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tcfswdallas@sbcglobal.net)  
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AUGUST  
2011  
NEWSLETTER

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Southwest Dallas County Chapter  
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The Southwest Dallas County Chapter of The Compassionate Friends hopes that you have benefited from receiving this newsletter. Our purpose is to support and aid families in the positive resolution of their grief following the death of a child. If you no longer wish to continue receiving this newsletter please mail this page to the return address or email [tcfswdallas@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tcfswdallas@sbcglobal.net) so your name can be removed from our list.